

RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH PERSIA-ACEH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The cultural encounter between Aceh and Persian traditions occurred through the approach of Sufism during the early spread of Islam in the Nusantara, where Islam was embraced as a socio-cultural ideology by the Acehnese people. The formalization of structural Islamic law in Aceh today has effectively closed off the possibility of religious moderation within the diversity of new cultural expressions. One of these measures is the establishment of Shafi'i school regulations as the main model in Aceh, which impacts the restriction and adjustment of certain traditions and arts that do not align with this school of thought. As a result, intercultural communication becomes an alternative approach to rebuilding mutual understanding, emphasizing the importance of tolerance, and appreciating cultural differences in Indonesia. However, the desired form of moderation has not yet materialized, as evidenced by the emergence of coercive attitudes within a singular religious perspective. Through an intercultural communication

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approach, this study reveals the moderation attitudes manifested from the cultural encounter between Aceh and Persia. The presence of Persian-style gravestones, still visible in several areas of Pidie (such as Giging, Bungiy, Meunasah Raya Paleue, and Cot Satu), serves as evidence of this cultural exchange. The descriptive-analytical method employed in this research uncovers several findings, including that history demonstrates the intense cultural communication between Persia and the Acehnese people as an expression of religious moderation. However, over time, with the implementation of structural Islam, the attitude of religious moderation has gradually eroded, either directly or indirectly.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation; Cultural Communication; Aceh; Persian*

Abstrak

Sejarah perjumpaan kebudayaan Aceh dengan kebudayaan Persia melalui pendekatan sufisme yang terjadi pada awal penyebaran Islam di Nusantara, dimana Islam diterima sebagai ideologi sosio-kultural masyarakat Aceh. Formalisasi Syariat Islam struktural pun secara aktual di Aceh hari ini telah menutup kemungkinan munculnya moderasi beragama dalam keberagaman ekspresi kebudayaan baru. Diantaranya adalah menetapkan regulasi mazhab Syafi'i sebagai model utama di Aceh dan hal ini berdampak pada pembatas dan penyesuaian beberapa tradisi, seni, yang tidak sejalan dengan mazhab Syafi'i. oleh karena itu maka Komunikasi antar-budaya adalah jalan alternatif untuk membangun kembali kesepahaman antar budaya, pentingnya sikap toleransi, dan menghargai perbedaan lintas budaya di Indonesia. Namun bentuk moderasi yang diharapkan belum terwujud nyata dengan munculnya sikap-sikap pemaksaan dalam satu pandangan beragama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan komunikasi antarbudaya, kajian ini mengungkapkan sikap moderasi yang terwujud dari pertemuan budaya Aceh dan Persia. ukuran batu nisan bercorak Persia yang masih bisa disaksikan di beberapa wilayah di Pidie (seperti gigieng, Bungiy, Meunasah Raya Paleue, dan Cot Satu). Metode deskriptif analitis yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini mengungkapkan beberapa hasil temuan diantaranya sejarah membuktikan bahwa komunikasi budaya Persia dengan bangsa Aceh berlangsung intens sebagai wujud sikap moderasi beragama namun perjalanan waktu dengan penerapan Islam struktural menjadikan sikap moderasi beragama terkikis perlahan baik secara langsung atau tidak.

Kata Kunci: *Moderasi Beragama; Komunikasi Budaya; Aceh; Persia*

مستخلص

قد كتب التاريخ هناك تبادل الثقافة بين الفارسيين والآشيين من خلال الصوفية التي حدثت في بداية انتشار الإسلام في الأرخيبيل ، حيث أن يجعل الإسلام إيديولوجيا اجتماعيا وثقافيا لشعب أتشيه. و القانون الإسلامي (الشريعة) في أتشيه أدى إلى إغلاق إمكانية ظهور الاعتدال الديني في تنوع التعبير الثقافي الجديد. لذلك ، يعد التواصل بين الثقافات طريقة بديلة لإعادة بناء التفاهم بين الثقافات ، وأهمية التسامح ، واحترام الاختلافات الثقافية في إندونيسيا. ومع ذلك ، فإن الاعتدال الديني المرجو لم يحقق في الواقع مع ظهور المواقف القسرية في رأي ديني واحد. باستخدام المنهج التواصلي بين الثقافات ، تكشف هذه الدراسة عن موقف الاعتدال الذي تجلّى في الاتصال بين الثقافتين الآشيه والفارسية. كشفت الطريقة الوصفية التحليلية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة عن العديد من النتائج ، بما في ذلك التاريخ الذي يثبت أن التواصل الثقافي الفارسي مع الآشيين-الملايو حدث

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بشكل مكثف كشكل من أشكال الاعتدال الديني. ومع ذلك ، بمرور الوقت أن تطبيق الإسلام البنوي جعل مواقف الاعتدال الديني تتآكل ببطء إما بشكل مباشر أو غير مباشر.

الكلمات الرئيسية : اعتدال ديني؛ التواصل الثقافي؛ آتشييه. الفارسي

A. Introduction

Moderation is an activity to organize, guide, and mediate interactive communication in oral or written forms. Moderation can also be defined as an activity to conduct a review to ensure that everything is in the right direction based on the applicable rules. In Arabic, religious moderation in Islam is called *al-Wasathiyah al Islamiyyah*. Islamic moderation is a view or attitude that always tries to take a middle position between opposing and extreme attitudes so that one of the two attitudes in question does not dominate the other. In other words, a moderate Muslim is a Muslim who gives opposing values or aspects in the correct portion.

K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, in,¹ argues that moderation must always encourage efforts to realize social justice, which in religion is known as *al-maslahah al-'ammah*. This must be used as the foundation of public policy because we can truly translate the essence of religion into the public sphere. Every leader has a high moral responsibility to translate it into real life, which the Islamic public can feel. It can be executed by being moderate in dealing with every problem. This principle of moderation is a characteristic of Islam in responding to all problems.

In the context of balance,² note that the Prophet also reminds his followers not to overdo it even when practicing religion. He prefers it if it is done naturally without being excessive. In the reality of real life, humans cannot avoid contradicting things. Therefore, *al Wasathiyah Islamiyyah* appreciates the elements of *rabbaniyyah* (divinity) and *insaniyyah* (humanity), a combination of *Maddiyyah* (materialism) and *ruhiyyah* (spiritualism), a combination of *revelation* (revelation) and *akal* (reason), and combination of *al-jamā'iyyah* (collective problems) and *al fardiyyah* (individual problems).

An example of tolerance embodiment shown by Rasulullah was when he sat with his friends and saw the crowd carrying the body of a nonbeliever, and He stood and gave a tribute. From this narrative, we can get a great message showing the model of respecting

¹ Misrawi, *Hadratussyaikh Hasyim Asy'ari: Moderasi, Keutamaan Dan Kebangsaan* (Jakarta: Buku Kompas, 2010).

² Alif Cahya Setiyadi, 'Pendidikan Islam Dalam Lingkaran Globalisasi', *At-Ta'dib* 7, No.2 (2012), 245–256 <<https://ejournal.unida.gontor.ac.id/index.php/tadib/article/view/74>>.

others, including respecting those who have different beliefs or cultures. Although the word tolerance is explicitly not found in al Quran, its synonym, al-tasâmuh, is found in the Islamic prophetic tradition. The suitable word with the root *al-tasâmuh* is found in hadith, *inni ursitu bi al-hanafiyyat alsahmah*. In this context, *as-samhah* has a linguistic affinity with *tasâmuh* or *samâha*, a modern Arabic terminology that refers to tolerance. This hadith is often used for Islamic reference, some to support tolerance among other religions, where Allah sent him to teach that tolerance. Rasulullah said "*ikhtilafi ummati rahmatan*" means that difference among my ummah is a grace. This hadith explains to us that difference is a certainty, and it depends on how we address and make diversity a beauty in society.³

These are some of the descriptions of this balance, commonly known as "moderation". The word moderation comes from English, i.e., moderation, which means moderate or not excessive attitude. A moderate person is someone reasonable, ordinary, and not extreme. In Arabic, the term commonly used is *wasat* or *wasatiyah*, which refers to a person called the referee. According to the Balitbang of the Ministry of Religious Affairs⁴, the word referee has been absorbed into Indonesian and has three meanings, namely 1) mediator, intermediary (for example, in trade, business, etc.), 2) mediator (separator, reconciler), between who are at odds, and 3) the leader in the match. Islamic moderation is a new discourse or paradigm for understanding Islam that upholds the values of *tasamuh*, plurality, and *ukhuwah*, or Islam that promotes the unity and integrity of the people, and Islam that builds civilization and humanity.

Moderation in Islam is expected to bring forth a peaceful, tolerant, safe, and tranquil image of Islam, as prescribed in the Qur'an and Hadith. All of this can be realized if the concept of Islamic moderation is applied properly. This can be realized if the concept of Islamic moderation is applied properly. The concept is a balance between two different sides, fundamentalists and liberals.⁵ Islamic moderation has been implemented in Indonesia for a long time. This can be seen in the form of spreading Islam in Indonesia, which was carried out peacefully, non-coercive, and respectfully to the local cultures. The spread of Islam in

³ Muhammad Miftah, 'Multicultural Education in the Diversity of National Cultures', *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)*, 4.2 (2016), 167–85 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v4i2.1766>>.

⁴ Ahmad Agis Mubarak, 'Islam Nusantara: Wujud Moderasi Islam Di Indonesia (Membangun Keharmonian Sosial, Budaya Dan Agama)', *Academia Edu*, 2019 <https://www.academia.edu/37987464/ISLAM_NUSANTARA_WUJUD_MODERASI_ISLAM_DI_INDONESIA_Membangun_Keharmonian_Sosial_Budaya_dan_Agama>. Hal.16

⁵ Mubarak, Ahmad Agis, 'Islam Nusantara: Wujud Moderasi Islam Di Indonesia (Membangun Keharmonian Sosial, Budaya Dan Agama)', *Academia Edu* (2019)

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Aceh cannot be separated from the influence of Persian culture, which has already experienced "enlightenment" and intellectual development. During this era, Islam was taught in unique ways and was embedded in art forms such as Rapa'i music, Saman dance, and other cultural remembrances.

These methods have made Islam acceptable to the people of Indonesia and formed a new style of Islam, namely Islam Nusantara. Islam Nusantara was born as an alternative model of thinking, understanding, and practicing moderate Islam, avoiding radicalism and liberalism. Islam Nusantara offers an anti-mainstream concept and idea. These concepts and ideas are expected to be able to build social, cultural, and religious harmony, as well as build Islamic civilization and humanity in Indonesia and the global context.

Islamic moderation is a way to bring Muslims together in diversity. Islamic moderation mediates all forms of extreme and distorted understandings and plays a vital role in creating world security and peace. The perceived benefits of this form of Islamic moderation are not only felt by internal Muslims but also by global society in general. In the Indonesian context, the term "Islam Nusantara" was born as a form of moderate Islam that is based on the cores of Islamic cultural traditions that for centuries have built a "conversation" with cultures from other parts of the world that came to the Archipelago, so that Islam spread in a peaceful manner (*As-Salaam*).

Religious moderation is a form of cultural "verb" to deal with extreme potentials that can damage harmony and peace in society. Being at the midpoint of the two corners of the extremity requires an educational process that opens awareness to exchange ideas and see creative possibilities in a complex society. Many social conflicts arise because of the absence of awareness of boundaries of fair tolerance between interested parties. Politicization also occurs at a time of efforts toward a conciliatory understanding. Religious moderation is based on efforts to prevent conflicts within a school or doctrine of thought within religion itself, which often leads to the exclusion of the existence of other different groups. The external implications will tend to widen the distance between humanity and different religions or beliefs.

Intercultural communication at this stage is a necessity. Dialectical dialogue between cultures will stimulate the emergence of an awareness of differences that help each other and even enrich the cultural insight of a nation. Aceh is a classic example of the future of a national entity with a high spirit of cosmopolitanism. Globalization has occurred since the

beginning of the entry of Islam into Aceh.⁶ Some of the world's great civilizations have entered the social system of the maritime community and experienced acculturation due to cross-cultural communication. One of the most substantial influences still felt until now is Persian-Islamic culture that penetrated Acehnese culture and then became very open, anti-sectarian, tolerant, and adaptive to change. Early Islam in Aceh became an altruistic spirit that combined with all forms of expression of folk art and social institutions and rejected the elitism of the Sharia, which was based solely on the teachings of punishment (*fiqhiyah*).

Special cases of actual formalization of Islamic law in Aceh show structurization efforts that deny historical products of communication between Persian and Acehnese cultures, which have become mental facts of the Acehnese people.

B. Discussion

1. Intercultural Communication

Based on the above explanations, it can be concluded that the relationship between communication and culture is very close and strong. Therefore, it is important to understand and learn about cross-cultural communication, especially in the demands of a developing era with globalization and technology. Indonesia is a multicultural country that has many ethnicities and cultures, making learning about cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly important to avoid conflicts between different cultural groups and, at the same time, maintain harmony between cultural groups.

2. Sufism in Islam

The style of early Islam that spread throughout Asia was Sufism, esotericism, and asceticism without the emphasis on symbolic elements of Persian culture as the one who preached it. The politics of Persian culture was made clear from the outset by the stakes of Persian and Arabic in Central Asia. The content of Persian poetry was more varied than Arabic poetry and, therefore, could be translated more easily and open to cultural mixing. Lewisohn (in Nasr, 2003:20) argues that one of the foremost scholars in the field of Persian Sufi Literature, 'Abd al-Husayn Zarrinkub had gone further by saying that "classical Persian poetry was so heavily influenced by the philosophy Sufism that almost every great poet was a Sufi, and vice versa. The role of Persian poetry in the efforts to widen the area of cross-cultural

⁶ M. Hasbi Amiruddin, 'Pemikiran Islam Kontemporer Dalam Benturan Budaya', *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 13, No.2 (2014), <<https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v13i2.71>>.

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communication and Islamic da'wah in the early period occurred because many scholars and preachers, especially Islamic jurists (*Fuqaha*), were not very familiar with the side of Islamic mysticism or Sufis. It is not surprising that later the development of Arabic was more formally dominant in state or sultanate formal educational institutions, compared to Persian, which tends to be absorbed directly in the local language and integrated with public communication in society. Islamic esotericism in the packaging of early Persian literature made it easier for cultural acculturation and built a spirit of tolerance in the social dynamics of society.

Marshall Hodgson in his monumental book on the history of Islam, the *Venture of Islam*, as Lewinsohn also admits, explains that the development of Persian culture in the 12th century AD as "a completely new cultural orientation in Islam" and beyond the realm of literature alone. Arabic and Persian languages hold different roles in religious and cultural contexts. Arabic maintains authority in the scientific and religious realms, especially with the existence of the Qur'an, Hadith, and other scholarly works in Arabic. Meanwhile, Persian serves as the primary medium for cultural and social expression, characterized by its etiquette, politeness, and refinement, particularly in poetry and literature. Persian served as a cultural language adopted by the Acehnese people.

According to Hodgson in Lewinsohn one of the socio-cultural factors of the rise of Medieval Sufism won the heart of the people as a sign of the congregation was tolerance. The broad reach of Sufism based on a tolerant mix of popular spirituality and "Sharia-oriented Sunnis" has provided moral support for a mainstream international order. Tolerance is the main character of Persian mysticism of the 13th – 15th centuries AD⁷. Generally, Sufis tend to be tolerant of local differences, while Sharia scholars do not as they need to concentrate on the outward-symbolic elements of religion. The Sufis, especially in the early medieval period, saw the differences between Islam and local traditions, Christianity, or social customs among Muslims as secondary. The primary is the spiritual inclination to God.

It can be stated more clearly that the models of religious moderation practiced by the networks and ties of Sufism have strengthened the local population's moral solidarity, which binds them to a system of universal brotherhood, such as *Pan-Islamism*, which later animates the exploration of Muslims in great conquests. The Sufis used the principles of the Sharia to offer a more robust principle of spiritual order to minimize the influence of power politics. The Sufis are eclectic; and benefit from Neo-platonic moral formulations or Hinduism that do not contradict the concept of monotheism.

⁷ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Warisan Sufi: Warisan Sufisme Persia Abad Pertengahan* (Jogjakarta: Pustaka Sufi (2003) 43

Moreover, the second factor is Anti-sectarianism. It was the foundation of Sufism's penetration into society. The universalism of the Sufis refuses to take sides with any group of schools of jurisprudence, even beyond the Sunni-Shia doctrine; Islam and non-Muslims. Sufis believe that all of these different points of view should be viewed as equal. The veneration of the Persian Sufis for the Sunni Caliphs and Shia Imams in their works is equivalent and transcendent to this dualistic vision of sectarianism. Anti-sectarianism is one of the moral foundations that prevents Sufis and practitioners of *tariqah* from being easily labeled as adherents of a particular ideology or sect within society. Sufism, in terms of worship and personal piety, employs various methods of approaching Allah known as *tariqah*. Although there are many *tariqahs*, they are not considered sects, as *tariqah* itself is merely a way of approaching Allah, not a grouping of specific teachings or ideologies.

The third factor is the direct experience (*Tahqiq*) versus dogmatic imitation (*Taqlid*). The open and tolerant attitude of the Persian Sufis opened their respect for observation and genuine spiritual experience or *tahqiq*. The mystical experience gained through mystical visions (*Kasyaf*) parallels the beliefs obtained from the revealed theology of the *fiqh* scholars. It suggests that the direct and personal Sufistic appreciation or esoteric Islamic experience will be readily accepted by the consciousness of the people who have been "oppressed" by dogmatic statements of the *ulamas* or exoteric jurists that must be imitated (*taqlid*). It is not surprising then that many Sufistic utterances such as *ratib tariqat* (Acehnese; *rateeb-meurateeb*) were popular in the community, both as part of complementary rites of worship and expressions of folk art.

A prominent example we can mention is the Saman dance in Aceh, which is strongly suspected to have roots in Sufi rituals and chants wrapped in the form of dance. Although the Saman dance does not directly show a historical connection with Persian culture, it has striking similarities with the traditional Iranian sport of *Warzeh El Bastani*, which collaborates with religious and cultural values. The movements in *Warzeh El Bastani* bear remarkable similarities to the Saman dance of Aceh, such as the snapping fingers, wave-like movements that go left and right, and are accompanied by rhythmic chants containing praises for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and life advice.

The Saman dance is a highly renowned art in Aceh and has even spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago. Initially, this dance is rooted in Sufi rituals and chants. History also explains that the development of this dance originally came from the *Tariqat Sammaniyyah*, a branch of the *Tariqat Syadziliyah*, founded by Abu Hasan Ali Asy-Syazily

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(d. 1258) in Egypt a branch of *Tariqat Syadziliyah* which was built by Abu Hasan Ali Asy-Syazily (d. 1258) in Egypt. The Tareqat Sammaniyyah was built by Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim as-Samany al-Hasani Al-Madani. It has significant influence in the North African regions from Morocco to Egypt, even Syria, and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. It is known as an ‘oppositional’ type of Sufi sect that refuses to be involved in political government and is more involved in activities in society. In this tariqat, Sheikh Saman wrote *Ratib Saman*, which contains praises to Allah and His Messenger (the Prophet Muhammad), which is always chanted in a loud voice during remembrance and later becomes a poem that continues to be echoed in every artistic expression⁸

Finally, the fourth factor is the aesthetics and mystical beauty of the Sufis, who gave birth to literary works, music, and paintings that directly touch the hearts of those who love arts, making it possible for Islam to spread throughout the world. Cultural communication is established, so that religious moderation exists.⁹ This factor is a continuation of the previous factor where the conceptions of Sufism are combined into art forms so that they become the principal capital in the process of spreading Islam to all parts of the world. In short, it can be concluded that the literary or other artistic approaches can touch the taste of humanity and raise public awareness in perceiving new religious values.

3. *The Beginning of the Spread of Islam in the Archipelago*

The process of the spread of Islam with an artistic and literary approach is an aesthetic-Sufistic communication model in the process of adapting pre-Islamic culture in Aceh. The development of Islam in Asia is indeed very beneficial for the spread of Arabic because it is the language of the Quran, but there is no denying the strong influence of Persian (non-Arabic) since Turkish, from Ahmad Yasawi (w.1167) to Yunus Emre (w.1321). Persian also had a lot of impacts on the great Muslim poets in the Indian sub-continent, even the emergence of the Malay language, which made the spread of Islam in the region impossible without the influence of the Persian poet.¹⁰

On the other side of the world, the development of Islam in South Asia and the Indian subcontinent was growing rapidly. At the same time, in the 10th century AD, there was a migration of Persians to the Archipelago, namely to the Leran, Gresik, Siak (Inderapura-Riau) areas, and Pasai, which originated from Jawani in the era of Jawani al-Qurdi, (913 AD), who

⁸ Imam Juwaini, *Saman Di Aceh* (Banda Aceh: BPNB). 11-12

⁹ Nasr. 62

¹⁰ Nasr. 13-14

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later developed the vocabulary of Jawi letters.¹¹ These suggest that the wave of Islamization based on culture and a literary approach took place simultaneously amid the glory of Islam in Central Asia, which was moving forward to the Archipelago and Southeast Asia.

Persian cultural communication with the Acehnese-Malays in the Archipelago took place even more intensely when the Samudera Pasai Kingdom was founded in the 13th century. Pasai was the first Malay kingdom to embrace Islam as an official religion and became the center of Islamic studies, which was bustling with the arrival of scholars, Sufi experts, and cultural thinkers from various regions. Ibn Batuthah, a traveler and mufti of the Maliki school of thought of Delhi, witnessed all the socio-cultural dynamics in the Pasai Kingdom during the reign of Sultan Malik Az-Zhahir in 1345 AD. While living there, Ibn Batuthah witnessed how much attention and protection the Sultan had for religious experts and how well he provided the main facilities for the palace artists and writers in welcoming guests.¹²

They gave a new touch to Malay literature as the main language of cross-sectoral communication in the context of spreading Islam. The pre-Islamic Old Malay language turned into pre-Classical Malay and underwent a transition back into Islamic Malay (Jawi) after many treasures of Islamic intellectualism were translated or adapted from Arabic and Persian, such as the science of monotheism, fiqh, and other Islamic epics.¹³ explains that in the history of Ibn Battuta's voyage, he witnessed that there were a lot of Persian and Indian-Mughal cultural relations in Pasai.

Apart from language as textual communication, Persian influence in Aceh is still preserved in the cultural tradition of the 10 Muharram commemorations, which in Persian is often called Ashura, and the naming of the month of Muharram as the month of Hasan and Husain. While in Minangkabau, the month of Muharram is called the Bulan Tabun (Month of Ark), and at this celebration, the people parade the ark, the coffin, as a symbol of death. The Ark tradition is believed to have been in existence in the Pidie region, Aceh. The story begins with a half-Indian who managed to steal the ring in the hands of Sayidina Husein after being martyred in Karbala. Later his descendants in Aceh, who knew the historical facts felt sorry for the disgrace and wanted to atone for the sins of history by walking around the village. They dressed in rags and begged for alms from everyone to be used in their special ceremony.

¹¹ Wan Hussen Azmi, *Islam Di Aceh: Masuk Dan Berkembangnya Pada Abad Ke 16. Dalam Ali Hasjmy. Sejarah Masuk Dan Berkembangnya Islam Di Indonesia.* (Bandung: Al-Ma'arif, 1989). 175

¹² Anthony Reid, *Sumatera Tempo Doeloe, Dari Marco Polo Sampai Tan Malaka* (Depok: Kaomunitas Bambu, 2024). 12-16

¹³ Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad* (Jakarta: Libra, 1996).

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All the utensils and equipment for the feast were imported from India, and when they finished, all the goods were thrown into the sea (Interview with Teuku Abdullah, 2021).

The tendencies of Sufism brought by many Persian clerics to the Pasai Kingdom made epic stories from the pre-Islamic Hindu era as they survived and still have an influence on the Islamic Malay language. Sanskrit vocabulary and poems are used in the vocabulary of Malay (new) Islam. The moderation side of Islam as a religion supported by the spirit of Sufism-Persia can maintain and protect local cultural processes. The efforts to translate Persian prose were not massively carried out. Arabic and Persian literature was slowly translated into Malay, specifically during the Aceh Darussalam Kingdom in the 16th century.¹⁴ The distribution of the classical Malay works illustrates the flow of the process of textual and cultural interaction between Acehnese and Persian cultures that was well maintained and lasted for 400 years later. The period in which the establishment of an Acehnese civilization took place without prejudice and intolerance hindered the emergence of the cosmopolitan spirit of the Acehnese people.

The adaptation of Islamic epics into Malay as a counterbalance to Hindu epics also occurred because of the strong bilateral relations between Persia and India-Munghal with Pasai. Hikayat (tales) comes from the Arabic term for short stories, but in Malay literature, it is intended for long stories due to Persian influence. These adapted stories from the Persian-Shia tradition are deeply embedded in the consciousness and memory of the Acehnese people, although sometimes they are mixed with a-historical myths. TA Sakti (Interview, 2021) explains that many heroes in the hikayat always mention Imam Ali's name before entering the battlefield, such as in Akhbarul Karim's Hikayat, which can be observed in the following stanza;

*Sabab dilee pahlawan
yang ek lawan kaphe cilaka
Leuh Hamzah Ali yang kuat
yang ek mee brat siploh gunca
Pat na kaphee lewat digampet
nak bek le rakjat yang matee*

There was a hero
Who were fighting the unbelievers (the colonials)
After the powerful Hamza Ali
Who could carry ten tons of weight
Where the unbelievers are flanked
So that people no longer die

¹⁴ Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad* (Jakarta: Libra, 1996)

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Recital or reading of hikayat openly like *Hikayat Hasan-Husen* often makes listeners in Aceh shed tears. Although there are many fictional elements in it, especially in the story of revenge for the death of Sayyidina Husein, which left a pregnant woman whom Muhammad Hanafiah wanted to kill, the people of Aceh believed that Yazid and Muawiyah were unbelievers. Those who practice alternative medical treatment in the western region of Aceh also recite healing mantras or prayers by mentioning Imam Ali's name many times. The Acehnese's belief in the stories in the adapted Persian hikayat emerged because they knew earlier about the greatness of these figures through the official history delivered by Islamic preachers.

The meaning of the hikayat here refers directly to the process of aesthetic communication of Persian prose, not from the treasures of Arabic literature. This is also clearly seen in the creation of Arabic-Malay (Jawi) writing sounds. When Malay vocabulary cannot be found in Arabic, Arabic letters are added with dots like those in Persian. It suggests that in Aceh, Arabic, despite its status as the language of the holy book of Islam, was not the primary language that must be studied and or used as the official language in religious teaching institutions. No religious regulation states that Aceh only allows one particular culture to develop. Moderate aspects of cultural activism have opened up opportunities for creative forms of literature and cosmopolitan civilization in Aceh.

Long before the arrival of Islam, according to Aboebakar,¹⁵ immigrants from Hindustan had already settled in Java and the surrounding islands and brought Indian culture and civilization along with them. After converting to Islam, they introduced a new religion to the entire Archipelago. In this Hindu society, there were Shias. Despite using Persian or Hindu names, such as Ar-Raniri, which is rooted in the word Render (Ranir), he was an *ahlul-bait* cleric. Although it is stated that Islam is taught according to the Ahlussunnah, the research shows that the Shia school of thought solved many everyday problems. Besides, there were also Sufi schools of Huluiyah or Wihdatul Wujud. Likewise, it was found that at the grave site of the king of the Peureulak Kingdom, Sultan Alaidin Sayed Maulana Abdul Azis Syah, and his wife, Putri Meurah Makhдум Khudawi, in East Aceh, who was in power from 840-864 AD were the words "Khuda" or "Khudi". These two words are an absorption word from the Persian (Urdu)-Persian, which means "Sacred-Self".

¹⁵ Aboebakar Atjeh, *ALIRAN SYI ' AH DI NUSANTARA* (Islamic Research Institute, 1977).

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4. *History of Radicalism of (Sharia) Islam in Aceh*

During Sultan Iskandar Muda's reign, the kingdom's mufti was Sheikh Syamsuddin As-Sumatrani, who came from Pasai. His works were heavily influenced by Hamzah Fansuri's mysticism, although he did not directly learn from him. In Hikayat of Aceh, Syamsuddin is described as a spiritual leader of the people and the recipient of reports of pilgrims returning from Mecca. European travelers who dealt with him between 1600 and 1630 called him "uskup" – bishop.¹⁶ Acceptance and openness to foreigners to embrace Islam made Syamsuddin acceptable in the context of other religious traditions and strengthened the spirit of moderation in the midst of religious and cultural pluralism in cosmopolitan Bandar Aceh.

Moreover, Nuruddin Ar-Raniri was born in Ranir in the late 16th century, an old port city on the coast of Gujarat, India. Before becoming a prominent figure in Aceh, he studied with the Shaykh of the Tarekat Rifa'iyyah, namely Abu Hafs 'Umar bin 'Abd Allah Ba Syayban Al'Tarimi Al-Hadrami (d. 1066H/1656M), known as Shaykh Ba Syayban. He finally got a position as mufti in the palace during the time of Iskandar Tsani, the successor of Sultan Iskandar Muda, in 1637 AD.¹⁷ states that after gaining the full trust of the Sultan, Nuruddin launched a violent attack on the followers of the Syam or those who followed Hamzah and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrany. Nuruddin also wrote a book that specifically discussed the criteria for deviant sects at that time. He labeled the followers of these two figures as misguided. He often debated with them. This event was witnessed directly by Sultan Iskandar Tsani. He called for all people to return to "sharia orthodoxy". He denounced adaptations of hikayat from Malay or prose from Hindu, such as Hikayat Sri Rama from the Ramayana.

The journey of Persian intercultural communication through Sufism and Hamzah Fansuri's literary works to experience religious experience directly was "interrupted" by Nuruddin's "sharia-ism" efforts which required social dogmatic (*taqlid*) experience in religious teachings. The pillars of religious moderation began to shake, and many books written by Hamzah and Syamsuddin were burned in the yard of the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque. The tensions were slightly eased when Sheikh Abdurrauf as-Singkili became the kingdom's new mufti during Sultanah Safiatuddin. Although he disagreed with Hamzah-

¹⁶ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Zaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) [Le Sultanat d'Atjeh Au Temps d'Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)]*, Cet. 2. (KPG Kepustakaan Pulpuler Gramedia, 2007).

¹⁷Hermansyah, 'Naskah Tibyah Fi Ma'rifat Al Adyah: Interpretasi Aliran Sesat Di Aceh Menurut Nuruddin Ar-Raniry', *Jumatara* 5, No.1 (2014), 43.

Syamsuddin's Sufism, he supported women's leadership as a moderating religious thought in Aceh.¹⁸

The difference in style and understanding, coupled with Nuruddin's strategic position in the political constellation of the kingdom, further weakened the cultural influence of Hamzah Fanzuri, who was in opposition outside the government system. The Islamic-Cultural power that grew strong and institutionalized under the influence of Hamzah's Sufism teachings experienced a decline and was under tremendous pressure from the actions and applications of Islamic-Structural by Nuruddin Ar-Raniry, who worked as the mufti of the Aceh government to formally enforce the Islamic Sharia Law.

The politicization of religion with 'political *fatwas*' in the context of power by denying the plurality of groups and getting rid of opponents who disagree with them has killed the spirit of moderation and the spirit of democracy. The resistance of the Sufis or those who represent Islam-Cultural will also be born as an antithesis of the political process of uniforming formalist religious expressions in a monolithic culture.

However, the structural establishment built by Ar-Raniry was disturbed after the return of Syaiful Rijal from Surat, India, in 1644 AD. Due to his character and background, he received respect and protection from Sultanah Tajul Alam Shafiatuddin. The palace gave Syaiful Rijal the highest religious position. This condition forced al-Raniri to step aside and return to Raner, Gujarat. He spent the rest of his life there, where he spent most of his time writing. He passed away on Saturday, 22 Dzu al-Hijjah 1068/21 September 1658 AD.¹⁹ Later, Sheikh Abdurrauf As-Singkily was appointed as the mufti replacing Syaiful Rijal. The public sphere of religious moderation and moderate Islamic thought would reopen and be able to nurture ideas of progress during the era of the leadership of the four Sultanahs in Aceh.

5. *The Actual Condition of Religious Moderation in Aceh*

The New Order regime in Indonesia allowed Islamic modernism to develop further and monitor all traditional religious movements that disrupted national political and economic stability and the exclusivity of social, political, and suppressed religious groups. Modern urban educational organizations, such as Muhammadiyah, are more prominent than the traditional Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in rural areas, which are still loyal to maintaining Sufism

¹⁸ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Zaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) [Le Sultanat d'Atjeh Au Temps d'Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)]*, Cet. 2 (KPG (Kepustakaan Pulpuler Gramedia, 2007)

¹⁹ Takeshi Ito, 'Why Did Nuruddin Ar-Raniry Leave Aceh in 1054 A.H.?', *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia and Oceania*, 134.4 (1978): 489-491

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values and social morals, even though both mass organizations adhere to the Shafi'iyah school of thought. In Aceh, the polarization of religious movements revolves around traditional notions, such as the Islamic Tarbiyah Association (PERTI) and NU, against the wave of Wahhabism that entered through national and transnational Islamic organizations, compared to the Shia group.

There is no record of a drastic confrontation between Sunni-Shia in Aceh under the clarity of Sufism after impartial politics carried out by Abdurrauf As-Singkily or Syiah di Kuala in the 17th century as a process of Aceh-Persian cultural communication that has been in existence since a long time ago. Persian cultural heritage resulting from symbolic interactions of centuries ago has created a continuous "cultural dialogue" in the process of forming Acehnese identity today. At the level of cultural phenomena, all matters of Aceh-Persian acculturation do not pose a significant problem and will have a severe impact when this reality is politicized as a symptom of silencing *aqidah* or penetration of other beliefs into Islamic traditions.

Cultural Islam which has been embedded in Aceh's traditional dictum "*agama ngon adat lagee dzat ngon sifeut*" (customs and laws are indivisible) in actual conditions filled with vertical political conflicts with the Central government, opens the possibility of more open public political participation. Previously, the Acehnese people only channeled structural-electoral political aspirations into the United Development Party (PPP) due to the fusion of Islamic parties from the Old Order Era until the fall of the New Order regime in the 1990s. However, after the birth of the Reform Order, the Acehnese people have openly given political support to other parties that do not formally display Islamic symbols.²⁰

C. Conclusion

Islam is a religion of peace, yet its practice is often affected by social, cultural, political influences, and various interests, leading to conflict and tension. Consequently, Islam's reputation, which is closely associated with peaceful values, becomes tarnished and subject to criticism and hatred. To address this, religious moderation is seen as having significant potential to restore Islam's image by highlighting its true values of tolerance, security, and peace. In the context of cultural interaction between Persia and Aceh, religious moderation serves as a bridge connecting the values of both cultures.

²⁰Alfian Alfian, 'Partai Persatuan Pembangunan Di Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam 1973-1998' (Universitas Sumatera Utara Medan, 2019).

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Persia has a rich Islamic history and has influenced various regions, including Aceh. Persian and Arab traders played a major role in the spread of Islam in Aceh. The Islamic religion they brought also influenced various aspects of local culture, such as art, literature, language, and legal systems.

In the realm of art, for instance, the Saman dance, though not directly derived from Sufi traditions, incorporates religious elements that have been adapted into Acehnese culture, which had an affinity for dance and linguistic prowess even before the arrival of Islam. Before Islam, dances in Aceh were performed during official Hindu-Buddhist ceremonies, characterized by slow, meaningful movements combined with praises to the deities. Following the advent of Islam, Acehnese dances were adapted into the Saman dance as an effort by Islamic scholars, becoming an effective means of proselytizing. The fast movements in this dance were influenced by Sufi traditions, known for their dynamic and rhythmic dhikr practices. These movements were combined with moral teachings and Islamic messages, making Islam easily accepted by various segments in Aceh as it was seen as moderate and harmonious with the pre-existing culture.

However, religious moderation faces challenges such as sectarianism and Sufism. Although Sufism is inclusive, it often intersects with sectarian views, as many Sufi orders have evolved into sects with distinct characteristics that are sometimes considered sectarian.

In Aceh, the application of moderation must take into account local traditions, such as the obligation to follow the Shafi'i school of thought and the Sharia qanun, which can limit diversity. Effective moderation requires a balance between respecting tradition and opening up space for diversity.

Overall, religious moderation through cultural interactions, such as the Persian influence in Aceh, has the potential to bring about communal well-being. However, this requires careful approaches and a deep understanding of how cultural and religious elements interact with the challenges of moderation.

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